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The CIA's New Cover

The Rope Dancer

by Victor Marchetti.

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Richard J. Barnet

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In late November the Central Intelligence Agency conducted a series of "senior seminars" so that some of its important bureaucrats could consider its public image. I was invited to attend one session and to give my views on the proper role of the Agency. I suggested that its legitimate activities were limited to studying newspapers and published statistics, listening to the radio, thinking about the world, interpreting data of reconnaissance satellites, and occasionally

publishing the names of foreign spies. I had been led by conversations with a number of CIA officials to believe that they were thinking along the same lines. One CIA man after another eagerly joined the discussion to assure me that the days of the flamboyant covert operations were over. The upper-class amateurs of the OSS who stayed to mastermind operations in Guatemala, Iran, the Congo, and elsewhere—Allen Dulles, Kermit Roosevelt, Richard Bissell, Tracy Barnes, Robert Amory, Desmond Fitzgerald—had died or departed.

In their place, I was assured, was a small army of professionals devoted to preparing intelligence "estimates" for the President and collecting information the clean, modern way, mostly with sensors, computers, and sophisticated reconnaissance devices. Even Gary Powers, the U-2 pilot, would now be as much a museum piece as Mata Hari. (There are about 18,000 employees in the CIA and 200,000 in the entire "intelligence community" itself. The cost of maintaining them is somewhere between \$5 billion and \$6 billion annually. The employment figures do not include foreign agents or mercenaries, such as the CIA's 100,000-man hired army in Laos.)

A week after my visit to the "senior seminar" *Newsweek* ran a long story on "the new espionage" with a picture of CIA Director Richard Helms on the cover. The reporters clearly had spoken to some of the same people I had. As *Newsweek* said, "The gaudy era of the

adventurer has passed in the American spy business; the bureaucratic age of Richard C. Helms and his gray specialists has settled in." I began to have an uneasy feeling that *Newsweek's* article was a cover story in more than one sense.

It has always been difficult to analyze organizations that engage in false advertising about themselves. Part of the responsibility of the CIA is to spread confusion about its own work. The world of Richard Helms and his "specialists" does indeed differ from that of Allen Dulles. Intelligence organizations, in spite of their predilection for what English judges used to call "frolics of their own," are servants of policy. When policy changes, they must eventually change too, although because of the atmosphere of secrecy and deception in which they operate, such changes are exceptionally hard to control. To understand the "new Age espionage" one must see it as part of the Nixon Doctrine which, in essence, is a global strategy for maintaining US power and influence without overtly involving the nation in another ground war.

But we cannot comprehend recent developments in the "intelligence community" without understanding what Mr. Helms and his employees actually do. In a speech before the National Press Club, the director discouraged journalists from making the attempt. "You've just got to trust us. We are honorable men." The same speech is made each year to the small but growing number of senators who want a closer check on the CIA. In asking, on November 10, for a "Select Committee on the Coordination of United States Activities Abroad to oversee activities of the Central Intelligence Agency," Senator Stuart Symington noted that "the subcommittee having oversight of the Central Intelligence Agency has not met once this year."

Symington, a former Secretary of the Air Force and veteran member of the Armed Services Committee, has also said that "there is no federal agency in our government whose activities receive less scrutiny and control than the CIA." Moreover, soon after Symington spoke, Senator Allen J.

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